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Strengthening the role of the United Nations in enhancing the effectiveness of the principle of periodic and genuine elections and the promotion of democratization

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report describes trends and significant issues in electoral assistance provided to Member States by the United Nations system over the past two years. Compared to the previous two-year period, the number of Member States receiving electoral assistance increased slightly to 59.

The report notes progress in strengthening coherence and coordination within the United Nations system, under the auspices of the focal point for electoral assistance. It also discusses cooperation with non-United Nations organizations. The report identifies ways to continue strengthening internal and external coordination, including through the integration of United Nations electoral assistance in mission settings.

With respect to gender equality in elections, the report notes that although there has been a steady increase in the share of women in parliaments worldwide, the global rate of elected women remains low and their participation in politics still falls far short of expectations. The report discusses the activities of the United Nations system in promoting the political participation of women and in supporting the efforts of Member States to meet their international obligations and commitments.

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The report also notes that elections conducted over the past two years have again demonstrated that there is a complex relationship between the sophistication of the technology used in an election and the level of confidence in the electoral process. In order to ensure that innovations are sustainable, new technologies are best introduced on a case-by-case basis in accordance with national needs and financial capacities.

The report discusses how principles and practices are applied in United Nations electoral assistance. It notes that while the technical aspects of an election are important, they are not an end in itself. It recalls that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights identifies the will of the people as the basis of the authority of government and that elections are the process by which this will is ascertained. United Nations assistance therefore aims to help authorities conduct elections that are a legitimate expression of the people's will and that enjoy credibility among national stakeholders.

In countries emerging from conflict, the highest objective of United Nations electoral assistance is to support genuine elections that further sustainable peace and stability. United Nations assistance focuses on strengthening the confidence and trust of national stakeholders in the electoral process and its outcome and on ways to prevent violence around elections. United Nations electoral assistance is most effective in yielding sustainable and comprehensive results when it is provided as part of a package of investments in good, effective governance at all levels, with the broader aim of promoting peace, stability and democratic governance. A good election alone is rarely sufficient to produce good governance; good governance on the other hand tends to produce good elections.

I. Introduction

1. The present report has been prepared to comply with General Assembly resolution 66/163 and describes United Nations electoral activities since the previous report on this subject (A/66/314).

2. Electoral assistance can be provided to a Member State only upon request, or based on a mandate from the Security Council or General Assembly. Electoral assistance is provided in conformity with the principle of the sovereign equality of States and the realization that there is no single electoral methodology or system that is appropriate for all countries. A needs assessment is always carried out before any electoral assistance is agreed or provided, in order to ensure that assistance is tailored to the specific needs of the country or situation.

3. The United Nations generally supports elections in the form of technical assistance. Other forms of assistance include expert panels. In the past, the United Nations has also organized and conducted elections, or verified and certified them, but these forms of assistance are now rarely used. Furthermore, the United Nations has not observed an election since 2001. During the reporting period, the United Nations provided electoral assistance to 59 Member States, 12 of them on the basis of a Security Council mandate (see annex II).

4. The period under review has shown a continuing interest among Member States for United Nations assistance in conducting electoral processes, as well as an evolving diversity in the nature of the assistance sought. The Organization has faced high expectations and challenges in helping to bring about peaceful, credible and cost-effective elections. Looking back at the experience over this period, the report sets out a number of comments and reflections on the nature and purpose of international electoral assistance, the role of elections in preventing conflict, the introduction of technology, efforts to bring about credible and inclusive elections, women's participation and the challenges of coordination in an active field of international support.

II. United Nations electoral assistance during the reporting period

A. Mandates

5. In its resolution 66/163, the General Assembly encouraged the Secretary-General to continue to respond to the evolving nature of the requests for electoral assistance and the growing need for specific types of medium-term expert assistance aimed at supporting and strengthening the capacity of the national institutions of the requesting Government. This evolving nature is reflected in the diversity of United Nations entities whose mandate or activities include electoral support.

6. As mandated by the General Assembly and most recently confirmed in its resolution 66/163, the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs is the United Nations focal point for electoral assistance (the focal point). In its resolution, the General Assembly reaffirmed the clear leadership role of the focal point within the United Nations system, including in ensuring system-wide coherence and consistency, in strengthening United Nations electoral institutional memory and in

the development, dissemination and issuance of electoral assistance policies. The focal point is also charged with maintaining a diverse roster of pre-screened electoral experts who can be quickly deployed to any United Nations assistance presence.

7. The focal point is supported in these activities by the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political Affairs. The Division functions as a global service provider to clients across the United Nations system. It is responsible for electoral needs assessments for the Organization, recommends to the focal point the parameters for all United Nations electoral assistance, advises on the design of electoral mission components or assistance projects and maintains the institutional memory of the Organization and its roster of experts. It provides, on behalf of the focal point, ongoing political and technical guidance to all United Nations entities involved in electoral assistance, including on electoral policies and good practices.

8. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the major implementing body of the Organization for support to developing electoral institutions, legal frameworks, processes and support to elections outside the peacekeeping or post-conflict context. In its resolution 66/163, the General Assembly requested UNDP to continue its democratic governance assistance programmes in cooperation with other relevant organizations, in particular those that promote the strengthening of democratic institutions and linkages between civil society and Governments.

9. In peacekeeping or post-conflict environments, electoral assistance is generally provided through components of field missions under the aegis of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations or the Department of Political Affairs. Military and police components of peacekeeping missions support national law enforcement agencies in providing security for electoral processes and UNDP frequently provides support to electoral assistance mandates undertaken by such field missions. The Electoral Assistance Division provides political and technical guidance to these electoral assistance providers on the ground. In countries with peacekeeping, peacebuilding or special political missions, electoral assistance is delivered in a fully integrated manner, irrespective of whether the mission is structurally integrated.

10. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continues to provide training and advice on human rights monitoring in the context of elections, supports and organizes campaigns for violence-free elections, engages in advocacy for electoral laws and institutions that are compliant with human rights and monitors and reports on human rights violations during electoral processes.

11. The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) is mandated to provide, through its normative support functions and operational activities, guidance and technical support to all Member States, at their request, on gender equality, the empowerment and rights of women and gender mainstreaming. It promotes gender equality and women's participation in political processes. UN-Women is also mandated to lead, coordinate and promote the accountability of the United Nations system in its work on gender equality and the empowerment of women. It provides training and guidance on promoting gender equality and women's participation in electoral processes.

12. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is the United Nations specialized agency tasked with promoting and supporting freedom of expression, press freedom and freedom of information. Free, independent media, online as well as offline, are essential to the transition towards democracy. To this end, the aim of UNESCO regarding elections is to strengthen the capacity of the media to provide fair and balanced coverage of electoral activities.

13. Other entities of the United Nations system involved in activities related to elections include the Department of Field Support, which is primarily responsible for providing administrative and logistical support services to United Nations peacekeeping operations, special political missions and other field presences; the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), which provides support to electoral activities, largely in post-conflict/peacekeeping environments, in partnership with the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, UNDP and Member States; the United Nations Volunteers programme, which provides electoral staff to work in UNDP, the field operations of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs; the Peacebuilding Fund, which can exceptionally support elections at critical junctures for peacebuilding; and the United Nations Democracy Fund, which supports projects that strengthen the voice of civil society, promote human rights and encourage the participation of all groups in democratic processes.

B. Cooperation and coordination within the United Nations system

14. In its resolution 66/163, the General Assembly reiterated the need for ongoing comprehensive coordination, under the auspices of the focal point, between the Electoral Assistance Division, UNDP, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support to ensure coordination and coherence and avoid duplication. The General Assembly also encouraged further engagement of OHCHR in this context. I am pleased to report that significant progress has been made in developing the policy and institutional framework to strengthen system-wide coherence:

(a) I facilitated system-wide discussions which more clearly delineated respective roles and responsibilities, including that of the focal point, taking into account mandates as defined by the General Assembly and appropriate United Nations bodies;

(b) Notable strides were made in the development of system-wide electoral policy, covering issues such as the principles and types of electoral assistance and the conduct of needs assessment missions. Work continues by the focal point on further detailing system-wide policy, in close consultation with United Nations system entities;

(c) The system-wide discussion on operational arrangements, including on recruitment and procurement processes, which I mentioned in my previous report,[1] is close to conclusion;

(d) The Department of Political Affairs, UNDP and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations have completed a joint review of integrated electoral

[1] See A/66/314, para. 17 (b).

assistance in mission settings. The findings will be used in the development of policy and practical guidance to further strengthen the integrated delivery of United Nations electoral assistance;

(e) The Inter-Agency Coordination Mechanism for Electoral Assistance, chaired by the Electoral Assistance Division, continued to meet on a monthly basis to exchange information, coordinate electoral activities and discuss the development of electoral policy. It also held two special meetings at director level during the reporting period to address a number of strategic questions, such as the implementation of electoral policy and the sharing of information among United Nations entities. As a sign of its relevance in coordinating system-wide efforts, UNESCO joined the mechanism in 2012;

(f) Discussions continue between the Department of Political Affairs and OHCHR on the development of coordination methods regarding human rights and electoral assistance and between the Department of Political Affairs and UN-Women on coordination methods regarding gender equality and electoral assistance.

C. Cooperation with other organizations

15. The United Nations continues its support to a number of global tools and initiatives aimed at promoting capacity-building, institutional memory and knowledge-sharing in the area of elections. These include: the ACE Electoral Knowledge Network, the Building Resources in Democracy, Governance and Elections (BRIDGE) project, and the Global Electoral Organization (GEO) conference.[2] During the reporting period, the United Nations worked with other partners to help ensure the sustainability and continued relevance of the ACE Network, including by assisting with the update of the ACE content and the translation of the ACE encyclopaedia into Arabic, Spanish and French. UNDP and UN-Women are partners in the International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW). The network provides a platform for exchanging information and networking among various interested stakeholders, to promote women's increased role and presence in political processes around the world.

16. Through its continued partnership in BRIDGE, the United Nations has provided capacity-building and training support to Member States. The BRIDGE project was expanded with a module on gender and elections developed by UNDP, which is being implemented in a number of countries by UNDP and UN-Women. The United Nations also continued its support to, and partnership with, the GEO conference, as the biggest global forum of electoral practitioners, to share experiences and discuss new ideas in the management of elections.

17. In line with the provisions of the framework for cooperation between the secretariat of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Department of Political Affairs, on behalf of the United Nations Secretariat, in September 2010, the United Nations assisted SADC with the establishment of its electoral support unit and with its efforts to establish the SADC Electoral Advisory Council. Support was also provided to the Electoral Commissions Forum of SADC countries. The United Nations continues to work on electoral issues in collaboration with regional intergovernmental organizations including the African Union, the

[2] For a description of these three bodies, see A/66/314, para. 21.

European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and many others. The United Nations provides electoral advice and support to the African Union through the United Nations office at the African Union and has also initiated discussions with the League of Arab States on areas in which capacity-building and training support could be provided to the League.

18. UNDP continues to deliver a significant part of its electoral assistance activities within the formal framework of its partnership with the European Union. In addition to joint projects at the country level, the partnership has hosted a number of global thematic workshops, including on elections and violence, the use of technology and sustainability in electoral administration.

19. The Electoral Assistance Division continues to participate in discussions to further enhance the performance of electoral observers, even though the United Nations itself rarely observes elections. The Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, launched at the United Nations in 2005, had been endorsed, as of May 2013, by 44 international and regional organizations. It establishes guidelines for impartial and professional observation of elections by intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and aims to standardize observation methodologies, including respect for national sovereignty. The Declaration has gained widespread recognition and now stands at the heart of credible international election observation. Moreover, in 2012, the Secretariat hosted the launch of the Declaration of Global Principles for Non-partisan Election Observation and Monitoring by Citizen Organizations. The Declaration, which as of July 2013 had been endorsed by 198 non-partisan citizen election observation and monitoring organizations from 80 countries, provides an important set of standards for accountability among non-partisan election monitoring organizations.

III. Gender equality and elections

20. According to data collected by the International Parliamentary Union, as of July 2013, women accounted for 21.3 per cent of parliamentarians in single and lower houses of parliament worldwide. This is almost double the 1995 proportion, when the global average for women's representation in parliaments was 11.6 per cent. While this is a progressive increase, the global rate of women's representation remains low considering that women comprise more than half the global population. More concerted efforts are needed in every region of the world to improve the situation.

21. Removing barriers to all aspects of women's political participation, including as voters, candidates and election officials, is a matter of fundamental human rights. I encourage Member States to take all the necessary steps to ensure that women do not face discrimination in any of the stages of the electoral process, including voter registration, civic education, polling, candidate security and media access. In certain circumstances, temporary special measures may be needed to overcome the challenges facing women in political and electoral processes.

22. Supporting national efforts to strengthen women's participation in elections continues to be a priority for the United Nations, as demonstrated in the development of United Nations electoral policies and in advisory and advocacy activities undertaken by the Organization. Within their respective mandates, relevant United Nations entities have assisted the efforts of Member States to meet their

international obligations and commitments, including those deriving from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the related general recommendation No. 25 (2004) of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on article 4, paragraph 1 of the Convention, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, General Assembly resolution 66/130 on women and political participation and Security Council resolution 1325 (2000).

23. Through its missions and electoral support projects, the United Nations continues to advocate for the participation of women in electoral processes and has encouraged and supported efforts by national authorities to include a gender perspective in their electoral legislation. Where appropriate, and upon request, the Organization has provided technical advice to Member States on the differential impact of electoral systems on women's political participation, taking into consideration that there is no single type of electoral system that would fit all circumstances and that it is up to each Member State to decide, as a matter of national sovereignty, which system would addresses its needs most effectively. The Organization has also contributed to numerous targeted outreach attempts to mobilize women's participation in elections as voters and candidates.

24. In collaboration with entities of the United Nations system, the focal point codified the central importance of gender considerations in a number of electoral policies adopted in 2012. Fully mainstreaming a gender perspective in all activities is now established as one of the principles of all United Nations electoral assistance. These principles also call for the United Nations to promote the involvement of underrepresented and marginalized groups, including women, in electoral processes. Considerations on gender equality have been mainstreamed into the planning and reporting of needs assessments. Every needs assessment must include an analysis of the challenges and opportunities for women's political participation in the country concerned, including the potential value of temporary special measures. Specific recommendations are also made in assessment reports on how best to increase women's participation. These measures draw on the well-established practice of United Nations electoral assistance teams to raise and discuss the representation of women with national authorities in countries where assistance is being provided.

25. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Field Support and the Department of Political Affairs have continued to revise their joint guidelines on enhancing the role of women in post-conflict electoral processes, originally issued in 2007, in collaboration with UNDP and UN-Women. UNDP has developed knowledge products in the field of political party engagement and women's political participation, including a 2012 guidebook on empowering women for stronger political parties in partnership with the National Democratic Institute. In the Asia-Pacific region, UNDP has facilitated the development of national action plans for women's political empowerment in three countries and continues its support in this regard to other countries.

IV. United Nations resources for electoral assistance

26. The regular budget of the Electoral Assistance Division covers its core staff costs, while extrabudgetary funds are also used for various assistance activities. Electoral assistance projects managed by UNDP country offices are typically funded

through voluntary contributions by Member States that often result in multi-partner basket funds, which include national counterparts in the management structure in order to ensure greater national ownership. In integrated peacekeeping and special political or peacebuilding missions with an electoral component, the mission budget covers some of the electoral work, while the balance, often quite substantial, is funded through UNDP multi-donor funding mechanisms. The Peacebuilding Support Office has occasionally utilized the Peacebuilding Fund to provide support to electoral processes through United Nations entities, for example through public outreach and education campaigns.

27. The trust funds administered by the Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs, along with the UNDP Global Programme for Electoral Cycle Support, remain important sources of extrabudgetary funding for electoral assistance activities. Such funds allow the implementation of rapid response and innovative or catalytic projects and programmes, including those aimed at the prevention of conflict and at supporting the participation of women and underrepresented groups in political processes. Extrabudgetary funds were used during the reporting period to rapidly establish activities, inter alia, in Algeria, Côte D'Ivoire, Egypt, Guinea, Maldives, Mali, Somalia and Yemen.

V. Elections and violence

28. I have previously underlined the political nature of elections and made a distinction between the technical shortcomings of an election — which may serve as triggers — and deep-rooted social, economic and political grievances, which are the true causes of violence.[3] In its resolution 66/163, the General Assembly recommended that, at the request of Member States, the United Nations might, in addition to providing technical advice, also provide assistance in the form of mediation and good offices.

29. In 2012, the Department of Political Affairs and the United Nations System Staff College successfully launched a training programme entitled "A political approach to preventing and responding to electoral violence". The aim of the joint programme is to provide United Nations staff with an understanding of both the political and technical dimensions of elections in order to prevent violence and mitigate its effects. UNDP has also integrated the phenomenon of violence into its electoral work. In 2012, for example, it trained staff in all its country offices in Asia concerned with electoral projects on how to conduct assessments and identify options to reduce the risk of violence.

30. The United Nations can and should do more to understand the connections between elections and conflict and to develop tools to address them. I have asked the focal point to advise me further on the political, legal, technical and security elements that can increase or diminish confidence in an election. This should place the United Nations in a position from which it can advise national authorities, where appropriate, on ways to mitigate tensions and possible "zero-sum politics" before and after an election. This requires looking beyond the rules and conduct of an election itself and considering ways to realign the electoral stakes in the political system and culture of a country. For example, to avoid "winner take all" dynamics

[3] See A/66/314, paras. 35-47.

and to encourage peaceful transitions based on credible and acceptable election results, Member States could consider embedding into the political and legal order a structured and legitimate role for opposition groups, or lawful access to State resources.

31. The impact of armed groups on the credibility of elections in post-conflict situations also requires further study. While there should be incentives for armed groups to join a political process, their ability to use weapons to subvert the process or intimidate voters should be curtailed, they should renounce violence and a clear path to eventual disarmament should be developed. It will be important to identify effective practices in the relationship between, and the sequencing of, disarmament efforts and elections.

32. The following paragraphs describe three instances in which the United Nations applied a broader approach to elections and violence. These are examples only, chosen from among a number of other cases and by no means represent the entire spectrum of the work of the United Nations system on elections in these contexts.

33. The first case relates to Liberia. The period leading up to the presidential and parliamentary elections in Liberia in 2011 was tense. The opposition complained about an uneven playing field favouring the incumbent President and alleged that the National Elections Commission would rig the elections. While the run-off elections were held in a generally peaceful manner, they were marked by an opposition boycott, low voter turnout and violent clashes between police and unarmed opposition supporters on the eve of the polls.

34. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), in close consultation with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), engaged political actors in an effort to lessen tensions before, during and after the elections, in addition to providing technical and significant logistical support and mobilizing international financial assistance. Among other support, UNMIL provided good offices to the National Electoral Commission to establish an inter-party dialogue and to obtain consensus on the legal framework and improving perceptions of the impartiality of the Commission and UNDP provided technical assistance and advice to the Commission. UNMIL also assisted the Liberian authorities in developing their security plan and bolstered its posture to reinforce national police and other security services around the polling days to deter violence and prevent escalation. The mission also provided logistical support to approximately 150 ECOWAS electoral observers. UNMIL was temporarily reinforced during the electoral process by military and formed police units, as well as related supporting elements, from the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI), with additional UNOCI units and equipment on standby for rapid deployment to Liberia. Other United Nations entities have also worked towards peaceful elections in Liberia. In September 2012, the Security Council extended the mandate of UNMIL to support the post-electoral reform process in Liberia, including national reconciliation, constitutional reform and decentralization.

35. The second case concerns Yemen. On 23 November 2011, following months of upheaval and violence, political leaders in Yemen signed a transition agreement — the Gulf Cooperation Council Initiative and Implementation Mechanism — for a transfer of power from the President to the Vice-President and a two-year transition period. The agreement was the result of face-to-face negotiations facilitated by my Special Adviser on Yemen working closely with the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, the

Security Council and other international partners. The agreement provided, as an initial phase of the transition, for the delegation of powers from the President to the Vice-President, the creation of a unity Government and for the conduct, with United Nations support, of presidential elections in February 2012 with a single consensus candidate (the then Vice-President). These initial steps are part of a longer-term political transition. A UNDP electoral support project was launched, building on assistance provided prior to the uprising of 2011 and including support from the Peacebuilding Fund.

36. In the pre-election period, Yemen continued to face numerous political and security challenges, including popular dissatisfaction with economic conditions, political disengagement and discontent, particularly among youth, as well as armed opposition to the central Government. Not all political actors had endorsed the political agreement. My Special Adviser, in cooperation with the United Nations Resident Coordinator and the United Nations country team, encouraged broad political engagement in the process and participation in the elections. The elections, on 21 February 2012, were held in a largely peaceful manner, with fewer security incidents than anticipated. At 60 per cent of registered voters, turnout was higher than anticipated. On 25 February 2012, the swearing in of President Hadi brought to completion the first phase of the political transition.

37. My Special Adviser, supported by mediation experts of the Department of Political Affairs, has continued to engage with all political sides in Yemen to move the political process forward. The successful holding of the elections in February 2012 created a conducive environment for the national dialogue conference, currently under way, and for the ensuing constitution-making process. The UNDP project, in the meantime, has continued to build the capacity of the national electoral authorities and support the development of a new list of voters to build confidence in future elections in Yemen.

38. The third case relates to Kenya. In anticipation of the elections in March 2013, the people and institutions of Kenya took notable steps to avoid a recurrence of the violence that erupted after the elections in 2007. Following the conclusion of a power-sharing agreement in 2008, a constitutional reform process was initiated to address underlying grievances. Among other changes, the new constitution, adopted by referendum in 2010, mitigated the zero-sum politics around the presidential election; changed the voting rules to require a broad geographic spread of support, in addition to a majority of votes, to win the presidency; devolved executive and legislative power to the counties; and restructured the parliament and other public institutions. The process also included judicial reforms and the creation of a new election commission.

39. In the run-up to the elections in March 2013, United Nations entities undertook broad and system-wide efforts to help prevent conflict. UNDP provided technical support to the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission; the Director-General of the United Nations Office in Nairobi, the United Nations Resident Coordinator and senior officials of the Department of Political Affairs engaged with political leaders throughout the process, working in liaison with Kofi Annan in his capacity as Chair of the African Union Panel of Eminent African Personalities on Kenya. UN-Women supported civil society efforts to promote and support women's political participation; UNESCO, in cooperation with others, held training workshops for journalists; and OHCHR monitored the human rights situation during the elections.

40. The elections saw their share of technical difficulties, as well as a few incidents of violence before polling day. Legal challenges were filed against the preliminary results, but the judicial rulings on these challenges and the final outcome of the elections were accepted by political leaders and the electorate in a peaceful environment. While improvements to the electoral process were a contributing factor, it was the long-term vision of Kenyans to address the root causes of the violence in 2007 and 2008 and their commitment to peace that led to this outcome. The smooth transition of power is a credit to the citizens and leaders of the country.

VI. Sustainability

41. I remain concerned about the potential for international assistance to lead to the introduction of technologies and systems that may be too costly for receiving countries to maintain in the long run. The General Assembly echoed the need to observe sustainability and cost-effectiveness in providing United Nations electoral assistance in its resolution 66/163. Elections carried out during the reporting period, both with and without United Nations assistance, continue to demonstrate that the relationship between the success of an election and the use of technology is not always straightforward. Investments in this regard need to be carefully considered. New technology may be best introduced as a solution to problems that might hinder the credibility of the process or the acceptance of results, not as an end in itself.

42. These important themes were discussed by members of electoral management bodies from around the world and international advisers at two global conferences organized during the reporting period by the Joint European Commission-UNDP Task Force on Electoral Assistance. The first, held in Kenya in 2012, focused on taking informed decisions about the possible introduction of technology in electoral processes. The second, in Mozambique in 2013, discussed sustainability in electoral administration more broadly, including the future of international electoral assistance. Participants agreed that comprehensive and consultative feasibility studies should be carried out before introducing new technological solutions into election processes.

43. While the financial aspects are critical, the notion of sustainability is broader and extends to political sustainability. The latter revolves around the question of whether national actors have sufficient confidence and trust in their electoral processes and in their political system as a whole. The United Nations approach to electoral assistance recognizes that credibility does not arise out of the polling process itself, or indeed one single event. The sources of political trust and acceptance lie deeper. Since elections are periodic events, their credibility, and that of the electoral administration, should be built and sustained over time, within a broader framework of sustainable democratic institutions and practices. We should nevertheless keep in mind that the ultimate objective is to empower each recipient country to carry out its own sovereign process.

VII. Observations

44. The United Nations has provided electoral assistance to Member States for several decades and it has been almost 25 years since the General Assembly began

its consideration of this agenda item. I am encouraged that the United Nations and others, including regional organizations, have developed an impressive body of principles and practices aimed at improving electoral administration worldwide. Much of the United Nations electoral assistance involves sharing these principles and practices. However, as the General Assembly has noted, there is no single model of democracy and elections are a sovereign matter.

45. It is important to recognize that conducting genuine elections requires more than improving technicalities or comparing processes against international obligations, commitments and practices. I wish to emphasize that elections are fundamentally political, rather than technical, events; and more importantly they are not an end in themselves. The purpose of an election, as articulated in article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, is to ascertain the will of the people regarding their Government. In this respect, I reiterate that a genuine election is ultimately one in which the outcome reflects the freely expressed choice or choices of the people.

46. I am committed to ensuring that United Nations assistance ultimately helps national authorities to conduct elections that are a legitimate and sovereign expression of the people's will and enjoy credibility among national stakeholders. I encourage and support the efforts of Member States to comply with their international obligations and commitments as they apply to elections, including, as relevant, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

47. I wish to underscore that it is not enough that an electoral process produces an accurate outcome. Citizens must have trust that this outcome does indeed reflect their will. In many situations, building this trust from the beginning is the key priority and the focus of United Nations advice. Measures that tend to enhance trust and confidence include broad political consultation on the rules of the game, including the electoral system and electoral laws; the appointment of electoral authorities that are and are seen to be honest, impartial and capable; transparency in electoral administration; state neutrality; inclusiveness, especially of politically marginalized groups, including minorities; and efforts to enhance the political participation of women.

48. Electoral authorities must administer the process honestly, fairly and transparently and earn the trust of participants. However, the greatest responsibility for peaceful and credible elections often rests with political leaders and candidates. Their commitment to peaceful conduct and to playing by the rules will largely define the actions and attitudes of their supporters. Their magnanimity in victory or grace in defeat can move the country forward and define their own legacy. The readiness of those who win elections to listen to those who did not vote for them and to work with the political opposition can accelerate stability and deepen democracy.

49. In working to build confidence, especially where there is a risk of electoral violence, it is important to take a broader and longer-term perspective. Elections can be a trigger for discord or violence, but the causes are most often systemic and unresolved political grievances not directly related to the electoral process itself. I encourage all efforts to address key political inequities and institutional deficits. Building a shared understanding of how a country is to be governed after the

election, can often be more effective than increasingly intricate electoral safeguards against technical errors, inconsistencies or fraud.

50. United Nations electoral assistance, where it is requested and provided, should complement other United Nations system activities — to the extent that they are mandated or requested — in support of peaceful transitions, democratic governance, the rule of law, human rights and gender equality. Just as elections are not isolated technical events but are an integral part of domestic political processes, United Nations electoral support should be part of a broader approach to promoting peace and stability, as well as democratic governance. A good election alone is rarely sufficient to produce good governance; good governance on the other hand tends to produce good elections. I encourage Member States to pay attention to integrating these political, security and technical perspectives when adopting mandates for United Nations peace operations.

51. Supporting the national efforts of Member States in ensuring inclusive political processes and promoting women's political participation is one of my highest priorities. I am encouraged that in countries where the Security Council has mandated the United Nations to provide electoral assistance since 1989, women occupy, on average, 23.3 per cent of all seats in the lower house, or single house if there is only one. This is a higher share than the global average. At the same time, much more remains to be done, as women's participation in politics globally still falls far short of expectations. Through its electoral assistance, the Organization will continue to promote and advise on the implementation of the international commitments of Member States, including consideration of temporary special measures. The United Nations should also strengthen advocacy in countries that do not receive electoral assistance and in developed countries. The main framework for United Nations advocacy to accelerate women's political participation continues to be the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the related general recommendation No. 25 (2004) of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on article 4, paragraph 1 of the Convention.

52. I am encouraged by the increased international interest in elections and electoral assistance, which has led to more dialogue, better access to comparative data and more reflection on the nature and purpose of assistance. But this has also meant that the number of organizations active in the field has steadily grown. Where such organizations provide comparable services, competition for resources increases and coordination becomes more complex. Despite the worthwhile initiatives of committed organizations and talented experts, there is a risk of overcrowding. I again encourage Member States, when requesting assistance or when drafting United Nations electoral mandates, to consider entrusting the United Nations with a lead role in ensuring coherence and coordination among all electoral assistance providers.

53. My focal point for electoral assistance has made progress in ensuring coherence within the United Nations system through the adoption of electoral policies in close consultation with members of the Inter-Agency Coordination Mechanism for Electoral Assistance. However, coherence does not result from the issuance of policies alone. It also requires consistent implementation of those policies and exchange of information. Coordination, where it works well, can add value to our efforts. Where it does not, we face high transaction costs and a loss of

effectiveness in our support to Member States. I intend to strengthen this aspect of collaboration among United Nations entities and I count on their commitment to help implement this goal. I encourage Member States to support my efforts to ensure that all United Nations electoral activities take place within the framework set by the General Assembly.

54. The United Nations system has adopted the principle that all electoral assistance in peacekeeping, peacebuilding or special political mission settings should be delivered in a fully integrated manner from the outset, irrespective of whether the mission is structurally integrated. This is in keeping with the agenda of delivering as one United Nations and makes support to national institutions more effective and cost-efficient. I encourage Member States to endorse this principle and also support efforts to ensure greater coordination and coherence of United Nations electoral assistance in all non-mission settings from the outset.

55. Elections conducted over the past two years have again demonstrated that there is a complex relationship between the sophistication of the technology used in an election and the level of confidence in the electoral process. As the Supreme Court of Kenya recently noted in a ruling on election challenges, "it is apparent that electronic technology has not provided perfect solutions. ... Since [it] has not yet achieved a level of reliability, it cannot as yet be considered a permanent or irreversible foundation for the conduct of the electoral process." Of course, such a conclusion may not necessarily hold true for every Member State. That is why the decision to introduce new technology is best taken on a case-by-case basis in accordance with national needs and financial capacities, following a comprehensive and consultative feasibility study.

56. The demand for electoral assistance is an indication of the general appreciation of the work of the United Nations in supporting democratic development, including credible, periodic and genuine elections. However, as stressed in my previous report, investments in elections alone will not yield sustainable and comprehensive results. Peace and development require good, effective governance at all levels, including an independent and professional judiciary, full respect for human rights and gender equality, open and pluralistic media, a robust civil society and a credible and responsive Government. I believe that the deliberations on the development agenda beyond 2015 offer a good opportunity to discuss the linkages between development, peace, human rights, good governance and elections.

Annex I

Selected examples of United Nations electoral assistance during the reporting period

Côte d'Ivoire

1. The first legislative elections in Côte d'Ivoire since 2000 were conducted on 11 December 2011. They were characterized by a relatively low voter turnout and some violent incidents. Following complaints of campaign violations, the Constitutional Council annulled the results in 11 constituencies. Repeat elections were held for these districts — as well as one district where a candidate had died — in February 2012. The repeat polling took place in a generally peaceful atmosphere, except in two districts. In one of these districts, UNOCI peacekeepers escorting the transport of results sheets were attacked.

2. Following the elections in December 2011 and the repeat elections in February 2012 and February 2013, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Côte d'Ivoire certified on 20 February 2013 that all stages of the legislative elections had provided the necessary guarantees for open, free, fair and transparent elections. This signalled the end of the certification mandate of the Special Representative, in line with existing peace accords and Security Council resolution 1765 (2007). UNOCI, UNDP and UNOPS provided technical, advisory, logistics and security support, including in distributing materials.

3. Local elections were held on 21 April 2013 for the 197 municipal and 31 regional authorities. Despite minor incidents in a dozen constituencies, the Independent Electoral Commission announced the results of 194 constituencies by 29 April 2013. Following the local elections of 21 April 2013, the Supreme Court nullified results in two municipalities and in one region, based on complaints. Results were also revised in four municipalities, but without an impact on the results. On 19 June 2013, in consultation with the Commission, the Government decided to hold repeat elections in the three constituencies concerned, where results were cancelled, and in one municipality where the vote did not take place due to tensions during the vote. Security Council resolution 2062 (2012) gave ONUCI a reduced electoral assistance mandate vis-à-vis local elections, commensurate with the country consolidating stability and rebuilding national capacities. The electoral assistance provided by UNOCI in an integrated manner with UNDP and UNOPS, focused on technical advice to the Electoral Commission and contributing to the security of local elections.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

4. The presidential and legislative elections were held on 28 November 2011 amidst daunting logistical challenges. Member States and the United Nations expressed concerns about the irregularities reported by several observer missions and called for a thorough and open review of the elections. These included reports of electoral irregularities, violence against electoral workers, arbitrary arrests and destruction of property and election materials.

5. The United Nations provided technical and logistical support through an integrated international technical assistance team comprising the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

(MONUSCO), UNDP and UNOPS. The integrated assistance team focused on capacity- and institution-building of the Independent National Electoral Commission. It supported operational planning, gender mainstreaming, training, voter education, procurement, deployment of personnel and electoral materials and information technology, such as setting up a website and updating the voter database. UNDP also worked to strengthen outreach to voters and the capacity of female candidates and continued its advocacy for mainstreaming gender into the electoral process. UN-Women helped develop training materials on gender mainstreaming in electoral processes; MONUSCO and UNOPS supported the deployment of national and international observers; and UNESCO trained journalists in Matadi and Bukavu on election reporting. UNDP suspended its electoral support activities in April 2013 on the recommendation of its donor partners, due to delays in implementing electoral reforms, while continuing its outreach activities on electoral and democratization questions. The promulgation of the revised organic law on the Independent National Electoral Commission on 19 April 2013 and the establishment of the Commission in June 2013, represent critical steps towards reviving the electoral process and possible re-engagement with the Commission for the preparation and organization of provincial and local elections.

Honduras

6. UNDP provided technical assistance to the institutional development of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal in the preparations for the general election on 24 November 2013. Support was provided in establishing and strengthening gender and training sections within the Tribunal and in reorganizing sections relating to census, mapping and communications. UNDP supported capacity development through the BRIDGE initiative in cooperation with UN-Women. It also coordinated the use of funds from several donors and promoted South-South cooperation with other electoral institutions, such as the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico and the Electoral Tribunal of Panama.

Iraq

7. Elections to the governorate councils were held on 20 April 2013 (12 governorates) and 20 June 2013 (2 governorates). Preparations were under the full responsibility of the Iraqi authorities, the High Electoral Security Committee and the Independent High Electoral Commission. Tight security arrangements were put in place and while several serious violent incidents occurred in some parts of the country, overall the atmosphere was calm and the democratic spirit of the Iraqi people prevailed. Candidates and voters nevertheless faced a challenging security environment prior to the elections, which limited the extent of campaigning and public assembly. Three appeals against the provisional results were upheld by the independent Electoral Judicial Panel, leading to changes in three winning candidates. On 1 June 2013, the Independent High Electoral Commission certified the final results of the polling held on 20 April for the 12 governorates. More than 26 of all winners country-wide were women. Moreover, at least 25 per cent of the members of each of the 12 governorate councils are women.

8. During the reporting period, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), together with its partner organizations, UNDP and UNOPS, as well as UNESCO until 2012, continued to provide technical advice and to build up the

capacity of the Independent High Electoral Commission in an integrated manner. This included advice to the national authorities on the selection process for the new Board of Election Commissioners, appointed in September 2012. The capacity of the Commission to deliver credible elections has continued to grow over the years with United Nations support.

Libya

9. An integrated United Nations team, led by the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) and also comprising UNDP and UNOPS, assisted the Libyan authorities in organizing and conducting elections to the General National Congress on 7 July 2012. These were the country's first free elections in 47 years, with a 62 per cent turnout of voters. The legal framework included temporary special measures for women, who won just over 16 per cent of the seats. The United Nations team provided technical assistance and advice and took the lead in coordinating other international electoral assistance providers. UNSMIL provided options and expert advice to the National Transitional Council on the legal framework, including for the establishment of the High National Election Commission and the conduct of elections to the General National Congress. Through UNDP, the United Nations ensured the management of donor funds and supported the Commission in the procurement of election materials. The United Nations strengthened the institutional capacity of the Commission and promoted an inclusive electoral process, with an emphasis on the participation of civil society groups, women and minorities.

Timor-Leste

10. The Technical Secretariat for Electoral Administration of the Government of Timor-Leste effectively organized two rounds of the presidential election in March and April 2012 and the parliamentary election in July 2012, with the National Electoral Commission supervising the electoral process. The elections were characterized by high voter participation of 73-78 per cent, a calm security environment and acceptance of results by all candidates, political parties and the general population. Quotas established in the electoral legislation resulted in women assuming 38 per cent of the seats in parliament (25 out of 65 seats), the highest in the Asia-Pacific region.

11. An integrated United Nations team, consisting of the United Nations Integrated Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT) and UNDP, in collaboration with other United Nations agencies, including UN-Women and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), provided technical assistance and advisory support to Timor-Leste for the presidential and legislative elections. United Nations support to the Timorese election authorities focused on technical and advisory support in management, administration, legal matters, information technology and voter registration, operations and logistic planning, voter and civic education and outreach initiatives. With United Nations support, the electoral management bodies also produced outreach campaigns and materials aimed at enhancing the participation of marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as youth and first-time voters, women and elderly and disabled persons. UNMIT also facilitated democratic governance forums throughout the country on peaceful elections and provided limited air transport for electoral officials and materials to inaccessible areas on election days. The national

police effectively provided the necessary security throughout the electoral process, with the UNMIT police playing a support role.

Tunisia

12. Tunisia held elections to its National Constituent Assembly in October 2011, which were widely recognized as a success, with 51 per cent of eligible voters casting their ballots. Women secured 58 seats, representing 27 per cent of the 217 delegates. Despite some operational challenges, the Independent High Authority for the Elections conducted the process professionally. A UNDP project provided technical assistance to the national authorities and supported civil society organizations for public outreach activities and women candidates and UNESCO trained journalists and editors-in-chief on election reporting. Since the elections, UNDP has continued to support the institutions responsible for the electoral process, in particular the National Constituent Assembly in designing a new legal framework for elections and the new electoral management body. Support to civil society and women's political participation has also continued.

Annex II

Countries and territories receiving United Nations electoral assistance during the reporting period

Afghanistan*

Algeria

Argentina

Bangladesh

Belize

Benin

Bhutan

Bolivia, Plurinational State of

Burkina Faso

Burundi*

Cambodia

Cameroon

Côte d'Ivoire*

Democratic Republic of the Congo*

Djibouti

Egypt

El Salvador

Georgia

Ghana

Guinea

Guinea-Bissau*

Haiti*

Honduras

Iraq*

Jordan

Kenya

Kyrgyzstan

Lebanon

Lesotho

* Assistance provided under a Security Council mandate.

Liberia*

Libya*

Madagascar

Malawi

Maldives

Mali*

Mauritania

Mexico

Mongolia

Mozambique

Nepal

Nigeria

Pakistan

Panama

Republic of Moldova

Romania

Rwanda

Senegal

Sierra Leone

Solomon Islands

South Sudan*

Thailand

Timor-Leste*

Tunisia

Turkmenistan

United Republic of Tanzania

Yemen

Zambia

Zimbabwe

State of Palestine